The Historical Significance and Function of Letters in Shaping American Identity, 1790-1865

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Abstract

Letter writing is a necessity for communication in early America; thus, the history and culture of America is documented in letters. This project studies texts from 1790 to 1865 in order to examine the conventions, characteristics, and intimacy of letters that resulted from America's reliance on correspondence in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Although letters are not typically considered part of literary history, they significantly influence the early American novel and therefore need to be studied.

Chapter one looks at how the letter-writing manual defines letter writing as democratic. The genre of the letter-writing manual aims to educate American citizens on the specific tools needed for proper letter writing; however, this goal does not support the definition of letter writing as an egalitarian skill. The second chapter analyzes the employment of letters to protect young women and their virtue in the texts *Charlotte Temple* (1794) by Susanna Rowson and Hannah Webster Foster's *The Coquette* (1797). Chapter three examines Nathaniel Hawthorne's letters to Sophia Peabody to evaluate the practical use of letter writing and its adaptation of conventional letter writing and romantic ideals in order to construct an intimate relationship.

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Introduction

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, Americans depended on letters to communicate with one another. Letters were sent for countless reasons: as invitations, letters of introduction, to share gossip or news, in courtship or seduction, letters of inquiry or business requests, and various others. Letters had the power to create, sustain, and ruin relationships between friends, family members, and lovers. Letters were saved and cherished or, in some cases, burned. Many letters were read aloud to others for entertainment and some found their way to museums for visitors to examine.

Because of the importance of letters to everyday affairs, letter writing was an art that many Americans wanted to learn. For this reason, there were handbooks written with rules and guidelines instructing readers how to write letters properly. These letter-writing manuals were self-help books for Americans who were not educated on writing proper letters; they were, however, marketed to both practiced letter writers and the uneducated. Practiced letter writers wrote letters often and desired assurance that their knowledge and understanding of letter-writing conventions was correct, while the uneducated were people who had not been taught how to write a letter and wanted instruction on writing a proper letter. The manuals were interested in teaching people to write letters and were committed to the idea that letter writing is a learned skill. In this way, letters became defined by society as democratic and the idea existed that every American had the ability to write proper letters.

The manuals described the conventions of letter writing to their audience and included model letters for their readers to imitate in their own correspondence. The detailed descriptions provided on the conventions were given as an attempt to regulate and standardize proper letter

writing. The letter-writing manuals insisted that letter writing was a natural form of communication between people.

The epistolary novel, a text composed solely of letters between characters, and various other novels from the period used letters to illustrate the characters' interactions and thoughts. Epistolary novels study life, as do all novels, but they are primarily concerned with the function of letters in portraying life. Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple* (1794) and *The Coquette* (1797) by Hannah Webster Foster are examined to evaluate the role of letters in fictional settings.

The Coquette is an epistolary text and one of the first American novels. Foster uses letters to depict the seduction of a young and fashionable lady. *Charlotte Temple* is not an epistolary novel, but it does employ letters throughout the text to fully illustrate the plot. *Charlotte Temple* was chosen to contrast with the epistolary novel because both texts use letters in order to present the characters' emotions and thoughts to the reader. Letters are used in both the epistolary and non-epistolary text in similar ways; as a result, the texts reinforce one another's claims on the properties of letters.

The fictional letters in the novels mimic the model letters presented in the letter-writing manuals in that they address conventional topics and are written in the proper tone and style. In both *The Coquette* and *Charlotte Temple*, letters are used to protect the young lady from seduction and, after her fall, to redeem her character. The letters of protection are written from female friends and family members in order to warn the young lady of her seducer's true intentions. These letters are only temporarily successful, and the suitor does seduce the lady. After her ruin, the lady writes to the same friends and loved ones to ask for their understanding if

not their forgiveness. Both Rowson and Foster show their protagonists being forgiven and mourned, evidencing the power of letters to redeem the fallen woman.

Nathaniel Hawthorne's courtship and love letters to Sophia Peabody are a concrete representation of letter writing in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Hawthorne uses the familiar conventions of the period and alters their intentions to include his own. Hawthorne wrote his letters with regard to the conventions of letter writing presented in the manuals and the properties presented in the novels, and he is able to construct an intimate and physical relationship with Sophia through his writing. He uses the traditional form of the letter to merge himself and Sophia into a single unit on a page, mingling their bodies and souls on paper. In this way, Hawthorne redefines the limitations of epistolary correspondence.

Chapter One: Letter Writing Manuals

Letters were a powerful tool and the only reliable mode of communication in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries for Americans. Because letters and letter writing were the hub of all human interaction, epistolary correspondence was given a great deal of esteem and importance. The popularity of letters in American society creates a need for regulation; thus, letter-writing guides were written to educate Americans on the conventions of letter writing.

Letter-writing manuals were relied on for instruction and consider themselves authorities on epistolary convention. The guides significantly define letter writing as a democratic skill, in that everyone has access to letters and is capable of letter writing. This definition expands to include the element of individuality in letters. Despite this definition, the guides present the strict conventions of and the appropriate tools required for proper letter writing in order to educate their readers. *Martine's Sensible Letter Writer* (1866) states its mission: "The following observations will, it is hoped, be found of some practical use to young persons, and assist them in avoiding error, and in acquiring a degree of proficiency in epistolary composition" (Dick and Fitzgerald 15). The goal of the manuals is to describe letter-writing conventions and discuss letter writing as a learned and perfected skill; this conflicts with the idea presented that letters are egalitarian.

The manuals consider learning proper letter writing an achievement of significant value, and testify that: "no accomplishment within the scope of human knowledge is so beautiful in all its features as that of epistolary correspondence" (Hartley 139). The authors of the manuals appeal to their audience's sense of respectability and reputation in their promotion of letter writing as an art. The manuals also insist that there is a natural human desire to write letters: "Men, being endowed with social dispositions, naturally desire to interchange…ideas"

(Quackenbos 13). The suggestion that letters are a natural form of discourse implies a biological need for proficiency in letter-writing conventions, which in turn presents the need for the letter-writing guides to document the proper conventions for epistolary correspondence.

Most letter-writing guides present material to their audience similarly, beginning with an extensive table of contents that covers a wide-range of business and social letters. The table of contents organize and briefly introduce the conventions of letter writing and the model letters included in the text. The subjects of the model letters are grouped together based on the existing relationship between the writer and recipient, the interaction that will occur, and the level of formality or familiarity that is expected in such an interaction. For example, the table of contents usually divides the model letters into two main sections, business and personal letters, and then presents general subjects for letters under those headings that may be pertinent to the reader. The personal letters usually include letters of invitation, correspondence between parents and their children, marriage proposals and refusals, and letters of condolence or congratulations. Business letters include letters of reference or application, inquiries, solicitations, and requests for goods.

The tables of contents are typically followed by a general introduction to letter writing, including the author or editor's explanation of the standard conventions of letter writing. The author or editor explains the subjects of the model letters with reference to the correct use and application of letter writing conventions within each topic. Each manual is explicit in its orderly presentation of the information and model letters. The manuals usually close with a collection of model letters divided into several main subject areas, including letters of advice, introduction, and invitation.

Through model letters and instruction, most letter-writing manuals advise the reader how to adapt particular letter-writing conventions in different situations and for particular occasions, always with consideration to the level of familiarity that exists between the correspondents and the gender of the writer and the receiver. The manuals typically explore similar topics; three areas that are often discussed are penmanship, paper choice, and sealing wax. The manuals stress the fact that they are educating the reader on the proper conduct of letter writing: "it has been the object of the author to present to those who seldom write letters, the necessary requirements appertaining to correspondence; and to those who feel the want of an assistant, a serviceable guide" (Cogswell 4). The manuals work to enforce the definition of letter writing as democratic by asserting that the conventions can be learned through review of the material presented in the guide.

The goal of the letter-writing manual genre is to educate Americans on the conventions of letter writing. The manuals share a basic layout and a similar perspective on the proper techniques and tools of letter writing wording. Although they provide model letters with suggestions for wording, the manuals are mostly engaged in commentary and instruction on the aesthetics and structure of the letter. The guides' explicit description calls for standardization within the art of letter writing; standardization is not consistent with the idea that letter writing is democratic and universal. The manuals encourage standardization without variation and thus limit the democracy of letter writing.

The manuals are meticulous in their description of the parameters of each letter-writing convention. Consideration is first given to the aesthetics of a letter and penmanship proves to be a crucial component. *Martine's Sensible Letter Writer* cautions its readers to "not take bad writing for freedom of style. Whatever pleasure your friends may derive from reading your

letters, you have no right to suppose that they have time for the study of *hieroglyphics*" (Dick and Fitzgerald 24). By giving the aesthetics of a letter the most attention, the letter-writing guides encourage standardization in their readers' letters. Many manuals agree that penmanship is the most important aspect in the appearance of the letter. Proper and elegant penmanship has a two-fold effect on the letter: clarity of handwriting makes the letter more aesthetically pleasing and the time spent on good penmanship reflects agreeably on the writer as well as on the amount of respect that he or she has for the recipient.

Proper handwriting was taught in schools; thus, educated citizens meet this requirement with less difficulty than those who are self-taught or non-educated. By definition, the genre of the letter-writing manual strongly promotes and encourages self-education. The guide therefore encourages readers to learn a steady hand; teaching oneself good penmanship requires a considerable amount of labor and dedication, but it is a learned skill. The importance of good penmanship to the aesthetics of proper letter writing is vital to its definition as a democratic skill; it is therefore available to all citizens who are willing to learn.

Aesthetic appeal is not the only incentive for good handwriting; penmanship is also regarded as the most noticeable representation of a writer's character in a letter and is therefore most important in conducting business affairs. *The Gentleman's Perfect Letter Writer; or, Hints and Helps to Letter Writing* (1877) ranks penmanship as a top priority and instructs its readers to "let each letter be well constructed and each word properly separated from the next" (Cogswell 6). The guide also explains to its audience that learning good penmanship "is a duty, not only to ourselves, but to those whom we address" (Cogswell 6). The identification of good penmanship as a necessary skill for letter writing and the belief that each citizen is capable of learning good penmanship opens the art of letter writing to all classes of people. Good penmanship is an

egalitarian skill because it does not require money and instead depends on the writer's own abilities.

There are other components that affect the aesthetics of a letter, including paper selection. The letter-writing manuals urge readers to select proper tools for letter writing, often discussing what is socially acceptable in society. "Gentlemen should always use white paper, ladies may use delicately tinted and perfumed paper" (Nichols 49). Gender is not the only determinant for paper choice; the writer's ability to write well also impacts his or her selection of paper. The manual *How to Write: A Pocket Manual of Composition and Letter Writing* (1857) advises: "Use the best white letter paper, either ruled or plain. If you can write straightly, evenly, and uniformly, without lines, unruled is best" (Jacques 9). European paper is recognized as the best paper available; it has the reputation of being the smoothest paper and well made. *How to Write* testifies, however, that American paper is comparable in quality and more affordable:

> The best paper in our markets has the stamp of the European manufacture upon it, though the article thus labeled is, in many cases, made in this country. Some American paper is in no way inferior to the best English and French fabrics; but because the foreign article had acquired a reputation among us before ours had reached its present perfection, some of our manufacturers have resorted to false labels in order to meet the demands of those fastidious people for whom home-made things are never good enough. Jacques 8

Paper is best complimented by dark ink; it is aesthetically desirable for the ink and paper to contrast starkly: "Use black ink—the best and *blackest* of black ink" (Jacques 10). This particular manual also suggests a recipe for making one's own ink, thereby making letter writing more affordable and more readily available to a wider range of Americans.

Many of the guides, however, do not advise their readers on how to acquire affordable tools for proper letter writing and insist that the reader believe the tools of letter writing are a product of propriety and taste. It is suggested that: "A half sheet is never in good taste"

(Cogswell 23). Letters must be written on regular-sized paper, measuring 8.5 inches by 11 inches. The paper "should be of good durable quality, and a white color is preferable. Cheap materials are not only unsatisfactory to the writer, but may give the reader an unfavorable impression" (Chambers 4). Many letter-writing guides argue that the unseemliness of buying cheaper paper outweighs the benefit of any monetary saving; this sentiment applies to other letter-writing tools outside of paper. The proper letter writing tools are expensive and have a limited range of use; however, most of the guides do not articulate the financial constraint involved in buying the proper tools.

Another tool required for proper letter writing in the nineteenth century is sealing wax. The manuals are firm in maintaining that sealing wax is the preferred method of sealing a letter; it is improper and discourteous to send a letter with the writer's spittle used to moisten the seal. The use of sealing wax and an official or stylish seal to imprint the wax greatly contribute to the aesthetic appeal of a finished letter. Selecting the proper sealing wax requires consideration of both the gender of the writer and occasion for the letter. A gentleman's manual notes that: "If you seal with wax, a small seal of red wax is considered most elegant" (Cogswell 23). Similarly, *How to Write: A Pocket Manual of Compositions and Letter Writing* outlines the many situations in which the use of different-colored sealing wax is appropriate:

> Gentlemen ordinarily use red sealing-wax; blue, yellow, amber, flecked with gold, and other pretty varieties, are used by the ladies, and sometimes in writing to them. White is appropriated to wedding occasions, and black is used for sealing letters of condolence, and notes announcing the death of a friend. Jacques 11

It is possible for a man or woman to select one color of sealing wax that is tasteful and less expensive for use on all types of letters. This possibility ensures that some tools for letter writing can be adapted to a person's financial means; regardless, this convention limits the availability of letter-writing tools with regard to social class.

The distinction between proper and improper tools for letter writing detracts from the idea of letter writing as democratic, in that it limits the equality of letter writing. The expense of purchasing the proper tools recommended by the manuals limits the democracy of letter writing. The writer must be able to purchase the correct supplies in order to write a letter within the standards outlined by the manuals. As a result, Americans with time, money, and education in their background are better prepared to practice proper letter writing as it is defined in the letter-writing manuals.

The rigid requirements in paper choice, propriety of sealing wax, and the aesthetics of letter writing are representative of the precise description offered in other areas by the manuals, including but not limited to: grammar, spelling, formality, and abbreviations. The letter-writing manuals do not consciously contradict the idea that letter writing is democratic in their presentation of the precise regulation in epistolary conventions. The manuals successfully construct a precise set of instructions to follow for proper letter writing without contradicting the universality of letter writing. The language used by the manuals to identify the correct tools for letter writing does not suggest limitation by social class nor does it imply that someone could not learn to write properly. The manuals are optimistic and encouraging; their goal is to promote letter writing as an American skill.

Pocket letter-writing manuals are not the only texts that emphasize the importance of letter writing and provide instruction on the conventions of proper letter writing. Sections on letter writing are also included in encyclopedias and other texts; this is significant because it confirms that Americans were interested in and desired precise knowledge of the conventions of letter writing. *The Household Encyclopedia of Business and Social Forms* (1883) is a comprehensive guide to the "various duties of life" and claims to have written "a book

embodying the rules recognized by the best society, and stating simply and plainly the exact thing that is required, and that should be done" (McCabe 5). In its self-promotion as an all-inclusive guide, the encyclopedia states its own usefulness and valuable nature as a guide. The encyclopedia claims to contain every useful and basic fact, and its inclusion of a section on letter writing evidences the prominence and necessity of letter writing in society. The text claims "there is no accomplishment more useful to the educated person than the ability to write a good and attractive letter" (McCabe 238). The encyclopedia provides valuable instruction on conduct for its readers, including proper letter writing as it is defined in letter-writing manuals. The inclusion of letter-writing conventions in conduct instruction books outside of the manuals evidences the standardization of American letter-writing conventions and the belief that letter writing is a form of conduct.

Many texts outside of letter-writing manuals argue the need for American citizens to possess knowledge of these conventions and insist on the universality of letter writing conventions. The inclusion of letter writing in a variety of texts signifies that letter writing is believed to be a skill to which every American has an equal right. *The Ladies' Book of Etiquette* sums up this position by stating: "There is no branch of education so universally into requisition as the art of letter writing; no station, high or low, where the necessity for correspondence is not felt" (Hartley 116). Etiquette manuals use letter writing as part of their instruction on conduct, propriety, and American culture. The significance of letter writing's inclusion in an etiquette manual is that it reflects the desire of a wider population of Americans to learn letter-writing conventions.

Letter writing develops in American history as an important skill of literate people, but it is also expected of uneducated people; the manuals state that all citizens should be familiar with the

basic standards and customs involved in letter writing. Letter writing can only be as universally available as the ability to write; the letter-writing manual genre desires to spread letter writing to Americans who have been educated but are ignorant of letter writing conventions. Letter writing is "one of the most interesting and important of accomplishments…one of the most easy of attainment, and one that is always valuable, as well to the child just learning to write, as to the most educated scholar" (Cogswell 5). The existence of the manuals as instructional guides ensures that every citizen has access to the conventions of letter writing. The availability of letter-writing manuals also gives the skill of letter writing the appearance of being shared among all members of society. As a result of letter-writing manuals, the proper conventions of letter writing are recognized throughout all social classes as a skill of literacy.

Letters are an intimate and immediate form of discourse; the manuals equate the immediacy of letters with the immediacy of conversation to compare letter writing to conversation. *The Household Encyclopedia of Business and Social Forms, Embracing the Laws of Etiquette and Good Society* proclaims that "the first and greatest truth that should be kept constantly in mind is that in writing a letter you are talking with your pen instead of with your mouth, and your aim should be to express yourself as simply and naturally as you would in conversation" (McCabe 238). This sentiment is echoed in other manuals: "Letter writing is, in fact, but conversation, carried on with the pen, when distance or circumstances prevent the easier method of exchanging ideas, by spoken words" (Hartley 118). Martine's guide states: "Letter-writing is but "speaking by the pen" (Dick and Fitzgerald 15). *The Young Man's Book of Classical Letters* (1851) agrees that: "When you write a letter to any person, express the same sentiments, and use the same language, as you would do if you were conversing with him" (Anonymous 14). The reassurance that the proper letter writing voice is natural supports the idea

that letter writing is egalitarian because all Americans are able to converse amongst each other. The manuals make the distinction that proper letter writing is more easily obtained by those who have better conversation skills. The manuals use the conversation analogy to coach a letter writer of a lower social class to adapt his or her written style and voice as he or she would in speech to address someone of a higher social class. In viewing letters as conversation, the practice of letter writing is more clearly identified as democratic in that it is more widely available and adaptable.

In addition to having a conversational tone, letter writers are also encouraged to write about topics of interest concisely and with an objective in mind. The *Advanced Course of Compositions and Rhetoric* (1879) supports this idea by emphasizing the importance of a letter being "a mirror of the writer's mind, and nothing is so likely as to insure this as a conversational style" (Quackenbos 357). Despite the encouragement to rely on conversation, the manual cautions its reader not to treat a letter solely as conversation. A letter must be written deliberately, with true intention, and with the knowledge that it is everlasting and immortal. Flippancy is considered careless, as "what is committed to paper does not, like conversation, pass into forgetfulness; it is preserved, and may, at time, be made public" (Quackenbos 357). It is imperative that the writer of a letter does not forget the permanence of his or her words on paper.

Letters, as necessary communication, are also very permanent representations of the time period. The nineteenth century letter-writing manuals engage in educating citizens about proper letter writing style and the aesthetic beauty that can be achieved through using the proper tools for letter writing. However, the letter-writing manuals are confusing in their instruction; they state that letter writing is a natural art, but include a wide variety of model letters as a starting-off

point or for copying onto one's own stationary. The manuals paradoxically define letter writing as a natural ability even as they simultaneously provide models for imitation to encourage their audience to learn to write a proper letter.

Chapter Two: The Epistolary Novel

Letters are used in novels and other writings in order to accurately portray the social and cultural life of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Just as the letter-writing manuals attempted to document the conventions of letter writing, early American novels document the properties of letters. The epistolary novel and other narratives experiment with the conventions outlined in the letter-writing manuals to demonstrate how letters are used in society.

The necessity of letters for communication greatly encouraged authors' interest in the function of letters in social relations. Novels, although often regarded as silly or inferior, were in a height of popularity during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in America. Men and women of all ages and social classes were well read and knowledgeable about the newest publications. Two novels that were particularly popular were Susanna Rowson's *Charlotte Temple: A Tale of Truth* (1794) and *The Coquette; or A History of Eliza Wharton; A Novel; Founded on Fact* (1797) by Hannah Webster Foster. These two authors attempted to define the role of letters in relationships and their influence on a person's actions, beliefs, and self-worth. Both Rowson and Foster wrote novels that employed letters to provide insight into the characters' emotions and also depicted letters as having the power to protect and redeem the protagonists.

Charlotte Temple and *The Coquette* are both classified as seduction novels and were written with the intention of educating young women on the danger of seduction. The formulaic seduction plot portrays a young lady who compromises her virtue outside the vows of marriage. The novels are interested in how letters are used by other characters to prevent the seduction of the young and virtuous lady. Although letters are able to successfully delay the seduction, the young lady eventually succumbs to her seducer. She proclaims herself ruined and the man

abandons her. The seduction plot calls for the death of the ruined woman in order to conclude the novel satisfactorily. Rowson and Foster are both interested in determining whether letters are then able to redeem the fallen woman.

While both texts enjoyed fame upon publication, *Charlotte Temple* and *The Coquette* continued to be very popular in the nineteenth century; this clearly demonstrates continued societal interest in the authors' discussion of letters and seduction. Elizabeth Barnes, in *States of Sympathy: Seduction and Democracy in the American Novel* (1997), describes the success of both *Charlotte Temple* and *The Coquette*. "Although bestsellers in their own day, neither novel confined itself to its own historical period…*The Coquette* reached the height of its popularity between 1824 and 1828, when it was reprinted eight times, while *Charlotte Temple* boasted over two hundred editions by 1905" (Barnes 103). *Charlotte Temple* and *The Coquette* are strong representations of the interests and beliefs of the nineteenth century society and, thus, are able to discuss the properties associated with letters during that time period.

Foster's audience is familiar with the background of her story because her novel is based on and published in the aftermath of the Elizabeth Whitman mystery. Elizabeth Whitman is a young woman from a good family who died alone while giving birth to a child in a tavern, and the mystery of her background is the inspiration for Foster's tale. Cathy Davidson's introduction to *The Coquette* testifies that: "By the time Hannah Webster Foster published her novel in 1797, the Elizabeth Whitman story had become well known in the new nation, an object lesson on the dangers of female rights and female liberty" (Foster IX). *The Coquette* is an attempt by Foster to rework the story of Elizabeth Whitman into a fictional account that stressed the need for women to make choices, to be educated, and to assert independence.

Foster's *The Coquette* is written in epistolary form, without a narrator to direct the reader, and presented as a collection of letters written between the characters in the text. Letters have the societal reputation of being unaltered and truthful, which supports Foster's claim that her story is a true account of events. Foster urges the reader to judge Eliza Wharton, the protagonist of *The Coquette*, and uses the epistolary structure of the novel to present the thoughts and actions of several different characters reading and writing the letters. The epistolary novel allows the reader to more easily project him or herself into each character's position; the reader is privy to each character's thoughts, actions, and reflections and able to judge them reasonably.

The appeal of the epistolary novel is that the reader is given the opportunity to read someone else's private letters, letters that are not meant for his or her eyes but that are addressed to a specific person. The blatant and encouraged intrusion into a character's privacy delights readers and builds intimacy immediately between the reader and character. This is significant in building a relationship between the reader connecting with the characters through the reading of their private thoughts and reflections in reaction to the conflicts and events in the plot. In contrast to a novel that utilizes a narrator to connect the reader to the text, an epistolary novel is particularly effective in making the reader respond personally to the characters and the plot.

Eliza Wharton is a protagonist constructed to be familiar to her audience. Her vocabulary and tone are typical of American society in the late eighteenth century. In her opening letter, Eliza cheerfully describes the freedom she feels upon moving away from home and out from under her parents' watchful eyes. Her fiancé has passed away and she is relieved and happy to have been loosened from the bonds of a life-long commitment. The reader is very much interested in Eliza's situation, and even more so by the unexpected urgency in her writing: "I must write to you the impulses of my mind; or I must not write at all" (Foster 8). This hasty

comment pulls the reader into the text; it appeals to the reader's curiosity to know the impulses of Eliza's mind and the reader then pays closer attention to her thoughts, concerns, and actions.

Foster faithfully represents Eliza as the well-educated and respectable woman that Elizabeth Whitman was shown to be in her life. "Readers are made sympathetic to Eliza's position by their familiarity with her writing style, her patterns of speech, and her ability to articulate, precisely and well, her intellectual and emotional conflicts" (Barnes 68). It is vital that, in a seduction plot, the author construct a character with whom an audience of young women will make a connection. Letters written to one of Eliza's dear friends reveal her conflicting emotions and situation in life; Foster hopes that her depiction of Eliza's struggle with her situation can be compared to the reader's own experiences and help the reader identify with Eliza's position. "One's apprehension of another's experience is understood to be achieved through the mediating influence of one's own emotions…[the reader] must imagine how the other feels; this can only be accomplished by projecting onto the other person what would be one's own feelings in that particular situation" (Barnes 5). The reader's connection to Eliza encourages that they consider closely the events of the text and the impact such events would have or have had on their own lives.

The reader's involvement and interest in Eliza's story is a result of both the reader's identification with Eliza and also because the reader is given the role of the all-knowing or omnipresent narrator. The reader reads the letters written by Eliza, her suitors, and her friends and is the most informed participant in the text on the events and intentions of each character. The letters give the reader the ability to see most of the action in the novel through more than one perspective; this ability enables the reader to judge the situation without bias. The power of

the reader as an all-knowing participant in the story is appealing because the reader is responsible for the fate of the story and the characters.

In *The Coquette,* Eliza must decide between two suitors. Mr. Boyer is a clergyman and will secure a good home for Eliza. Major Sanford enjoys flirtation and cannot be trusted with Eliza's happiness. Eliza is torn between her desire for Major Sanford and the security that Mr. Boyer offers to her. The reader is privy to the many letters of advice that Eliza receives, most of which are from the hand of her good friend and confidant, Lucy Freeman. Lucy writes: "Let me advise you then, in conducting this affair …to lay aside those coquettish airs which you sometimes put on…Act then with that modest freedom…which bespeaks conscious rectitude and sincerity of heart" (Foster 27). Lucy wishes to protect Eliza from Major Sanford and Eliza's attraction to him. She writes convincingly, encouraging Eliza to follow her heart with consideration to the knowledge and advice offered in Lucy's letter.

Lucy hopes that her many letters to Eliza will sway the heart of the passionate and idealistic young woman. Eliza requests that Lucy write to her and share her advice about Eliza's romantic conflict, and Lucy replies: "You desire me to write to you, my friend; but if you had not, I should by no means have refrained" (Foster 57). It is important to note that Lucy believes that her advice is necessary and, if not solicited by Eliza, would have been forced upon her. Through the medium of the letter, Lucy hopes to convince Eliza that her attraction to Major Sanford is not virtuous and unprofitable. With this example, Foster highlights the responsibility given to letters to protect a young woman's virtue, dignity, and purity.

Lucy's letters are able to temporarily convince Eliza that the consequences of her attraction to Major Sanford are detrimental to her future happiness and virtue. Eliza vows to encourage Mr. Boyer's affections and reject the advances of Major Sanford. However, Lucy's

advice is not as strong as Major Sanford's charming presence. Eliza writes: "I was much surprised, the first time I went to the play, to see Major Sanford in the very next box. He immediately joined our party; and wherever I have been since, I have been almost sure to meet him" (Foster 74). Major Sanford overcomes the protection of the warning letters written to Eliza with his physical presence and verbal language. Eliza's intense attraction to Major Sanford is evidenced in her rapt attention to his words and person. Barnes writes that: "The gentleman-seducer depends on his verbal skills to break down the woman's resistance" (Barnes 64). This is very true for Eliza, who is captivated by Major Sanford's charisma and his claim to be intensely jealous of her attention to Mr. Boyer. Major Sanford manipulates his voice to ensure Eliza's submission. Foster is concerned about the ability of men to seduce and manipulate women in this fashion.

Eliza's mental state is reflected in her letters throughout the text. Eliza is incapable of hiding her feelings and therefore is on display for the reader as well as the other characters in the novel. After falling from her virtuous state, Eliza writes to her mother: "Repentance comes too late, when it cannot prevent the evil lamented" (Foster 153). Eliza does not feel that language can describe her folly; she is not capable of conversation or hope. The protection of her virtue that the letter offered in the beginning of the tale is lost, and Eliza believes that the letter's power is not applicable to her ruined state. She writes: "The various emotions of shame, and remorse, penitence and regret, which torture and distract my guilty breast, exceed description. Yes, madam, your Eliza has fallen; fallen, indeed!" (Foster 153).

Eliza uses letters to redeem herself and express regret for her sin. Eliza's letter to her mother is apologetic and describes the remorse that she feels for her actions. Eliza does not expect that she will be forgiven nor does she believe herself worthy of forgiveness; instead, she

claims responsibility for her own choices. Eliza writes of herself: "She is polluted, and no more worthy of her parentage! She flies from you, not to conceal her guilt, that she humbly and penitently owns; but to avoid…a mother's frown" (Foster 153). The spunk and spirit of Eliza's writing is no longer evident in the letter to her mother; her voice is feeble and guilt-ridden.

Eliza's mother forgives her young daughter and mourns her death by remembering her virtuous life. After Eliza's death, her friend Julia Granby writes to Eliza's mother: "My testimony of Eliza's penitence, before her departure, is a source of comfort to this disconsolate parent" (Foster 162). Eliza's letters to both her mother and Julia Granby encourage the reader to forgive Eliza's ruined state. The remaining letters in the text describe Eliza's death similarly to a martyr and remember Eliza positively. The idea of letters having redeeming power is supported by the portrayal of Eliza's death.

Eliza is not the only literary figure who is protected and redeemed by letters in a seduction plot. *Charlotte Temple*: *A Tale of Truth*, is a non-epistolary novel that uses a narrator to tell a story of seduction. The author testifies in her preface that: "The circumstances on which I have founded this novel were related to me some little time since by an old lady who had personally known Charlotte" (Rowson XLIX). It is important to Susanna Rowson that her audience believe her tale is an accurate portrayal of a seduction.

Rowson works to construct a sympathetic reader for *Charlotte Temple* by employing a narrator to direct the reader's attention and promote understanding of each character's actions. The narrator in the text directly addresses the reader to encourage particular responses to the plot and is viewed as the authority figure in the text. The narrator will typically hypothesize the reader's response and then instruct the reader in the following fashion: "Yes, my young friends, the tear of compassion shall fall for the fate of Charlotte, the soul melts with sympathy; for La

Rue, it feels nothing but horror and contempt" (Rowson 109). In this instance, the narrator is speaking directly to the reader and demanding that he or she feel sympathy for Charlotte's situation while destroying any positive relationship that may have been made with La Rue, the woman who aided Charlotte's seducer. Rowson does not allow room for her reader to disagree with the narrator's judgment and gives the narrator the power to dictate how the reader should feel throughout the text.

This method contrasts greatly with the effect of the epistolary novel on the reader. The narrator instructs the reader without sharing with them the power to judge the characters and situations. The secrecy of letters in the epistolary text that both attracted the reader to the characters and informed him or her of specific events in the plot is absent. The reader is not permitted the opportunity to unobtrusively watch the story unfold and learn of the characters' many different perspectives on a single event in the text; instead the authoritative narrator tells the reader how to think about each event or a situation. The reader is not as involved in the story and, consequently, the distance between the reader and the text is greater in the narrative than in the epistolary novel.

Rowson's novel, however, is not unsuccessful in making the reader react to her story. Rowson's employment of an authoritarian narrator is representative of the time period's desire to create sympathetic readers for novels. Elizabeth Barnes testifies that the authors from the late eighteenth century wanted to work together to construct the desired mindset of their readers to ensure the success of the novel. "The novels themselves attempt to teach readers how to read. Through the formulaic repetition of certain plots, direct authorial address, and heightened affective manipulation" (Barnes 63). Barnes believes that the authors worked together to create an audience who would be effectively impacted by their work and, in doing so, discovered that

they were exploring the same techniques and ideas. In this respect, Rowson's narrator works to make the tale educational for readers, both in reading sympathetically and on the dangers of seduction.

Rowson evidences the danger of letters when Montraville, Charlotte's seducer, discreetly slips a letter into Charlotte's hand. The narrator of the text is used to explain the contents of the letter: "Any reader…will easily imagine the letter was made up of encomiums on her beauty, and vows of everlasting love and constancy" and to ensure that the reader is aware of Charlotte's situation: "In affairs of love, a young heart is never in more danger than when attempted by a handsome young soldier…she is in imminent danger" (Rowson 24-5). With the help of the narrator, the reader is wary of the contents of the letter, which matches Charlotte's innocent insistence that she "never read a letter given me by a young man, without first giving it to [my mother]" (Rowson 28). Curiosity and peer pressure, however, are able to supersede parental warnings. At her teacher's urging, Charlotte reads the letter and it is observed that: "the contents had awakened new emotions in her youthful bosom" (Rowson 30). It is unquestionable to the reader that the letter's impact on Charlotte will be detrimental to her virtue.

Charlotte's fascination with her seducer's letter is partly due to the secrecy of the event and also the passion that the letter encourages within her breast. Rowson chooses not to share the letter with her readers, but allows the reader to see Charlotte's attraction to the letter. Charlotte "indulged herself in reading over the letter, and each time she read it, the contents sunk deeper in her heart" (Rowson 36). The privacy of the letter encourages Charlotte to keep Montraville's words secret, and it is a certainty that she believes his profession of love to be true. Unlike Eliza's love letters, the reader is prevented from reading Charlotte's letter. This is

dissimilar to the epistolary structure of *The Coquette* because the reader is ultimately distanced from Charlotte's affair and unable to fully understand her actions.

Soon after Charlotte receives the letter from Montraville, a letter from Charlotte's mother arrives. Charlotte's mother does not possess any knowledge of Charlotte's situation nor of the danger that threatens her, but instead writes to her in hopes that she will visit home for a birthday celebration. Charlotte is instantly touched by her mother's purity and love. "I am snatched by a miracle from destruction! This letter has saved me: it has opened my eyes to the folly I was so near committing…I will not wound the hearts of those dear parents who make my happiness the whole study of their lives" (Rowson 46). Although Charlotte's mother is not writing specifically to protect her daughter's virtue, as was Lucy's intention in writing to Eliza, the letter is nonetheless successful in convincing Charlotte to guard her virtue from Montraville. Charlotte's fondness for her parents leads her to the conclusion that denying Montraville is a "triumph of reason over inclination, and, when in the arms of my affectionate parents, [I will] lift up my soul in gratitude to heaven as I look back on the dangers I have escaped" (Rowson 47).

Charlotte's parents' letter is only temporary protection for Charlotte's virtue. She is determined to sacrifice the feelings that she has for Montraville for her doting parents' affection and peace of mind. Charlotte is forced to confess her decision to Montraville in person, and the reader watches Charlotte engage in an internal battle between the protection of her parents' letter and the physical presence of her seducer. Throughout the scene, Charlotte vocally resists Montraville's words, but has conflicting emotions about her decision. Impatient with her struggle, Montraville physically places her into the chaise before driving away. The letter, although a tangible object, is not able to protect Charlotte from the physical claim that Montraville is able to place on Charlotte's person.

Charlotte writes home to her parents several times after traveling to America with Montraville. She entrusts her letters to Montraville and they are not delivered. Upon discovering that her parents have not received any of her letters, Charlotte writes a letter detailing her remorse. She asks her mother: "Will my once kind, my ever beloved mother, deign to receive a letter from her guilty, but repentant child? or has she, justly incensed at my ingratitude, driven the happy Charlotte from her remembrance" (Rowson 83). Again, the ruined woman is pleading for forgiveness in a letter and the reader feels sympathetic to her situation.

Charlotte, in her piteous state, begs her parents to forgive the child that is to be born into her shameful life. This letter is similar to Eliza's letter in that it is a cry for redemption. Charlotte has given up hope that her parents will forgive her own sins. Regardless, Charlotte is compelled to write on behalf of her unborn child: "But sure you cannot refuse to protect my innocent infant: it partakes not of its mother's guilt. Oh my father, oh beloved mother, now do I feel the anguish I inflicted on your hearts recoiling with double force upon my own" (Rowson 85). The terrible pain evidenced in Charlotte's letter forces the reader to take pity on her.

The redemption that Charlotte requests is articulated best in the last lines of her letter: "I feel I never more must hope to see you; the anguish of my heart strikes at the strings of life, and in a short time I shall be at rest…I beseech you, curse me not, my adored parents, but let a tear of pity and pardon fall" (Rowson 86). Charlotte's reliance on the letter to ensure her peace in the grave and protection for her infant speaks highly of the power of letters to heal wounds. The letter to Charlotte's parents successfully redeems her because she confesses to her sins and details the extent of her remorse. Charlotte is able to, through the letter, be optimistic about the future of her child's life and hopes that her parents will be just in their judgment of her own life.

The Coquette and *Charlotte Temple* both subscribe to the idea that letters are written to protect virtue and that letters can be used to redeem a character from sin. The letters written to protect the young ladies from seduction are temporarily successful, which insinuates that letters are effective as protection against sin. However, in these texts, physical power of the seducer is stronger than the protection offered by the letters. Letters are able to redeem the ladies from their ruined state, resulting in forgiveness from their families and friends.

Chapter Three: Nathaniel Hawthorne's Letters

The Coquette and *Charlotte Temple* both describe the seduction of a young lady and, in both novels, letters play a role in the seducing them into a sexual relationship outside of marriage, the attempted protection of her virtue, and in the redemption of her person following ruin. Nathaniel Hawthorne also writes seduction letters during his courtship of his future wife, Sophia Peabody, in that he wants to seduce her into another role. Although both are described as seduction, Hawthorne and the rakes in the novels differ greatly. Each have a specific goal and are using the letters to achieve that goal; however, Hawthorne is more interested in transitioning Sophia into the role of his wife and in connecting himself and Sophia physically through letter writing, while the rakes aim to sexually seduce the woman.

Sanford and Montraville each write one letter in the text of their respective novels to which the reader has access. The men do not rely on letters to seduce and instead depend on charisma and physical presence to obtain their goal. They do not intend to marry the lady that they are pursuing, but do wish to have physical control over her body.

Hawthorne shares his daily life and private thoughts with Sophia, while Sanford and Montraville insist on using flattery and physical attraction. Hawthorne's letters profess his love for Sophia and his hope that they will be united in eternity. The permanence of Hawthorne's words and his effort to share details with Sophia encourage a more successful connection between them than Sanford or Montraville can construct with Eliza and Charlotte.

The letters exchanged between Hawthorne and Sophia are real in that they exist and were written for another person. This contrasts with the fictional letters that are represented in the novels, but does not affect their success in forming a physical union between Hawthorne and Sophia. The letters written by Sanford and Montraville are not successful because they do not

employ letter-writing conventions. Hawthorne's letters, however, utilize many of the conventions presented in novels and the letter-writing manuals from the period. He incorporates the familiar language and techniques advocated in the letter-writing manuals in his letters, but Hawthorne's use of letters to connect physically with Sophia lends an unrestricted quality to his writing style.

In order to fully illustrate the contrasting properties of the three suitors' letters, it is important to examine each in its own context. Sanford writes to Eliza in the midst of her decisive thoughts on whether to commit to Boyer or Sanford. His letter influences her final decision in that he urges her to meet with him the following day: "Let me conjure you to meet me in your garden to morrow at any hour you should appoint…Deny me not an interview" (Foster 90). Boyer then discovers Sanford with Eliza and leaves with no intention of returning.

Sanford's letter is thus very important to the plot of *The Coquette*. It is evidently written in haste, evidenced by its length and the many explanation marks that illustrate his professions of passion and jealousy: "My mind is all anarchy and confusion! My soul is harrowed up with jealousy!" (Foster 90). Letter-writing convention frowns on Sanford's hasty tone and obvious passion; it evidences carelessness and would not have been considered a proper tone for an exchange between a suitor and a lady. Letters are intended to be well thought out and representative of the respect one has for the recipient. Sanford's letter is an impulsive reaction to being denied an opportunity to speak to Eliza by her mother; his rash response to his rejection is considered a product of ignorance for someone of Sanford's social standing. Additionally, he does not properly address the letter to her, but instead, in the third sentence, asks: "Oh my adorable Eliza, have you sacrificed me to my rival?" (Foster 90). Sanford uses the letter to compliment Eliza and claim her as his own in this letter, but it is hardly a profession of love or

even attraction. He is instead selfishly interested in describing the turmoil that his jealousy is putting him through, as well as his hopes for Eliza to have pity on him.

Notably, Foster does not give Sanford's letter a prominent place in the text. It is not given the same treatment as the rest of the letters, but is copied into the text of a letter that Eliza writes to Lucy. Foster does not feel that Sanford's letter deserves to be elevated to the same status as the other letters. It is not a reflection of her feelings for his character, as there are many letters that he has written to his friend displayed within the text customarily and given the same regard as Eliza's own letters. However, this specific letter is not. This is because Sanford uses the letter to manipulate Eliza; it is also because this letter is an ill-planned and outraged cry for attention. The letter does not articulate his intention for the requested meeting or his respect for Eliza; it merely illustrates his frustration at being denied an audience with Eliza.

Montraville, in *Charlotte Temple*, actually writes two letters to Charlotte. One of the letters, however, is withheld from the reader and only described by the narrator. The hidden letter is the seduction letter and the narrator instructs the reader to "imagine the letter was made up of encomiums on her beauty, and vows of everlasting love and constancy" (Rowson 24). This is a more conventional love letter in that Montraville wants to flatter Charlotte and communicate his feelings for her through traditional and acceptable means. Montraville designs this letter with thought and intention. Rowson chooses not to share this letter with her reader because it is a good example of a proper and conventional love letter; she does not falsely portray Montraville as having good intentions for his relationship with Charlotte.

Montraville writes his second letter to Charlotte after he has grown bored with their relationship. Like Sanford, he does not address the letter directly to Charlotte nor does he attempt to compliment her person in the letter. This evidences his carelessness in writing the

letter and displays disrespect for Charlotte. He writes: "My dear Charlotte must not be surprised, if she does not see me again for some time: unavoidable business will prevent me that pleasure" (Rowson 75). Montraville is courteous, but he does not echo his earlier intentions of a long relationship with Charlotte. Instead, he closes his short note by saying: "Make yourself happy, and be certain of the unalterable friendship of Montraville" (Rowson 75). His use of the word friendship evidences the switch in his intentions. It also falsely represents his and Charlotte's relationship and is thus not acceptable by conventional standards.

Nathaniel Hawthorne's letters to Sophia Peabody are unlike both Sanford and Montraville's letters. They vary in length, thought, depth of feeling, and promise for longevity. In examining the first three letters in the text *Love Letters of Nathaniel Hawthorne* (1907), dated April 2, April 17, and April 30, 1839, it is possible to discover how Hawthorne successfully constructs an intimate relationship with Sophia with the aid of conventional letter writing. Hawthorne's letters are typically written in leisure, reflective of his day's thoughts, and always in compliment to Sophia. Their relationship had already been established before these particular letters are written, but Hawthorne uses his familiarity with Sophia to write meaningful and lasting letters for her.

Hawthorne is successful in securing a lasting relationship because of his belief that his letters are able to ensure a spiritual and physical connection between himself and Sophia. Inspired by the letter-writing manuals' insistence and the cultural belief that letters are able to substitute for physical conversation, Hawthorne ascribes physical properties to their letters in order to imagine that the letters are Sophia's physical presence. After describing his interaction with Sophia's letters, Hawthorne then scripts the merging of the reader and writer on the page (Sophia and himself, respectively) into a single unit. As a result of Hawthorne and Sophia's

physical and spiritual intermingling, their letters can protect and strengthen their physical relationship and shared intimacy.

There is an element of predictability in reading Hawthorne's letters that would be familiar to a nineteenth century audience; he addresses the same topics and describes similar events in each letter. He frequently describes his daily activities for Sophia: "What a beautiful day—and I had a double enjoyment of it, for your sake and my own. I have been to walk this afternoon, to Bunker's Hill and the Navy-Yard, and am tired, because I had not your arm to support me" (Hawthorne 18). Travels are important to Hawthorne; he often tells Sophia where he has been and what he was doing, often including the time of day and length of time that he devoted to each task. Hawthorne also enjoys imagining that Sophia participated in his activities—in thought if not personally. He uses his letters to discuss and describe specific events from the day in a conversational tone, as letter-writing manuals recommend. Hawthorne's diligence in making Sophia an active participant in his life through his letters encourages the transition of Sophia into her role as his wife.

Hawthorne attributes much of his good fortune throughout the day to Sophia, regardless of the probability of her actions or affection for him having an impact on his luck. Hawthorne credits Sophia for his immunity to harm: "I have had to be out a good deal in the east-winds; but your spell has proved sovereign against all harm" (Hawthorne 21). Letter-writing convention instructs the suitor to hold his beloved in the highest regard with compliments and gratitude for her affect on the man's life. Hawthorne is also conventional in that he makes an effort to put Sophia on a pedestal by putting himself down: "I reckon upon your love as something that is to endure when everything that can perish has perished—though my trust is sometimes mingled with fear, because I feel myself unworthy of your love" (Hawthorne 20). In his compliments to

Sophia, Hawthorne emphasizes Sophia's spiritual influence on his happiness and the beauty of her soul; these are not traditional compliments. Hawthorne uses his letters to adapt conventional language and guidelines in order to tailor his language and style to his and Sophia's relationship.

Hawthorne is complimentary when writing about Sophia's letters and their affect on him: "Your yesterday's letter is received…it is the sunshine of my life" (Hawthorne 12). Hawthorne does not neglect to show his appreciation for her letters with a compliment on her writing, beauty, or intelligence. In his own letters, Hawthorne anticipates when he may receive a letter from Sophia; he emphasizes his desire to hear from her in his precise documentation of when each letter arrives and when he believes one should arrive. Hawthorne articulates his predictions for Sophia, as well as thoughts on why one may be late, and his joy in finding unexpected letters. He writes: "No letter, my dearest; and if one comes tomorrow I shall not receive it till Friday…If you had known this, I think you would have done your [best] possible to send me a letter today" (Hawthorne 10). Hawthorne's attention to epistolary communication forces both Hawthorne and Sophia to write often in order to ensure that their relationship continues to strengthen.

Hawthorne is not only interested in having a steady epistolary relationship with Sophia; he also desires that they form a spiritual connection through their letters. He writes: "I feel as if my letters were sacred, because they are written from my spirit to your spirit" (Hawthorne 8). Hawthorne believes that he and Sophia have an unearthly spiritual connection. He encourages Sophia to visualize their future as spiritual bodies able to communicate through the projection of thoughts into one another's consciousnesses. Hawthorne's insistence on using letters to form a spiritual connection is not traditional; letters are conventionally used to bridge distances, and his beliefs influence his writing style. Hawthorne further states that letters are the ideal form of communication for Sophia and himself to share their minds and hearts while human: "Let us

content ourselves to be earthly creatures, and hold communion of spirit in such modes as are ordained to us—by letters (dipping our pens as deep as may be into our hearts)" (Hawthorne 9). In this way, Hawthorne attempts to make the physical act of writing letters a testament of their spiritual connection and love for one another; he is also subscribing to the letter-writing manuals' belief that letter writing is the most natural and ideal form of communication between humans.

Hawthorne desires to physically connect his and Sophia's bodies through his letters in order to construct a lasting and intimate relationship with Sophia; he uses his letters to secure physical union with Sophia. Hawthorne writes to Sophia and describes the intimacy of his interactions with her letters to evoke a similar response from her. Hawthorne uses his epistolary correspondence with Sophia to interact with her physically outside of the limitations of physical presence. Hawthorne's intentions in describing his interactions with her letters are illustrated clearly for Sophia in his letters, aiding in the success of his quest.

Letters are the ideal form of communication between Sophia and Hawthorne because he uses them to connect physically with Sophia. "When this week's first letter came, I held it a long time in my hand, marveling at the superscription" (Hawthorne 17). Hawthorne often describes his physical interaction with Sophia's letters in his reply to her letter. He recreates and revisits his thoughts in order to accurately portray how he touched Sophia's letters as though her letter was a physical incarnation of Sophia. Hawthorne is intimate with the letters, he holds them in his hands and turns them over to feel their weight, examine her handwriting, and kiss them. The intimacy that Hawthorne shares with the letters is unique to his own writing. Hawthorne believes that Sophia's letters are a representation of her thoughts and soul, and not merely a reflection of her character. Hawthorne is again altering convention to fulfill his ideals; he

personifies Sophia's letters in order to have a more physical relationship with the letters than conversational interaction.

Hawthorne consciously labels Sophia's letters as his Dove, the endearing name he calls Sophia. "This forenoon I could not wait, as I generally do, to be in solitude before opening your letter…I pressed my Dove to my lips (turning my head away, so that nobody saw me) and then broke the seal" (Hawthorne 19-20). Hawthorne calls the letters the same name that he calls Sophia; it is conventional for Hawthorne to want the letters to substitute her presence. "I came back in very ill humor, and do not mean to be very good-natured again, till my Dove shall nestle upon my heart again, either in her own sweet person, or by her image in a letter" (Hawthorne 11). By making the letter representative of Sophia's presence, Hawthorne hopes to bridge the relative distance between their bodies. This effort is further illustrated by his description of his own actions: "[I] locked my door, and threw myself on the bed, with your letter in my hand. I read it over slowly and peacefully, and then folding it up, I rested my heart upon it, and fell fast asleep" (Hawthorne 20). Hawthorne wants Sophia's letter to be physically close to him, in a way that Sophia is not able to be. He illustrates this desire for her person through the personification of her letter.

Letters, especially love letters, require an exceptional amount of devotion from both the reader and the writer. The writer is responsible for making the love letter a true reflection of their person in order to bridge the distance between them. The reader holds the responsibility of cherishing the meaning hidden within the writer's words. Hawthorne greatly enjoys being a good reader: "When this week's first letter came, I held it a long time in my hand…several times since, I have poured over it, to discover how much of yourself was mingled with my share of it" (Hawthorne 17). Hawthorne wants Sophia's letter to represent both himself and Sophia; he

desires the letter to be representative of their union. Ideally, the love letter is able to mingle the writer and reader into one entity.

Hawthorne examines the merging of their selves on paper in relation to their letter-writing styles and personalities. "Certainly there is a grace flung over the fac simile, which was never seen in my harsh, uncouth autograph—and yet none of the strength is lost. You are wonderful. Imitate this. Nath. Hawthorne." (Hawthorne 17). Hawthorne's challenge to Sophia is not to learn his signature, but to delve deeper into their epistolary relationship in order to construct their intermingled self into a stronger, more developed being. Strength and grace are the two attributes that Hawthorne chooses to encourage and recognize; he references strength in order to highlight the letter's power and attributes Sophia's graceful hand as needed to create it.

In order to preserve the sacred union of himself and Sophia, Hawthorne ensures that his time spent writing Sophia was very private. An intruder would disturb the time reserved for Hawthorne's thoughts of Sophia. Hawthorne pays particular attention to privacy in each of the letters. On April 2, he begins his letter: "I should have begun this letter earlier in the evening, but was afraid that some intrusive idler would thrust himself between us, and so the sacredness of my letter would be partly lost" (Hawthorne 8). It is important to Hawthorne that the time he reserves to write Sophia be private and uninterrupted. If interrupted, the letter is not able to fulfill Hawthorne's construction of the perfect union between its reader and writer. Again, on April 17, he writes: "I feel pretty secure against intruders; for the bad weather will defend me from foreign invasion" (Hawthorne 13). His addendum to that letter, written on April 18, states: "my hopes of a long evening of seclusion were not quite fulfilled; for, a little before nine o'clock John Forrester and Cousin Haley came in" (Hawthorne 15-6). In a continuation to the April 30 letter, he writes on May 3: "My dearest, ten million occupations and interruptions, and

intrusions, have kept me from going on with my letter; but my spirit has visited you continually, and yours has come to me" (Hawthorne 21). Hawthorne confesses his disappointment at not being able to be alone with his letter to Sophia; regardless, he is optimistic that their spirits continued to be united without the medium of letters.

Traditionally, letters are written in privacy. The letter-writing manuals insist that the writer set time aside for writing letters, in order to concentrate fully on the aesthetics and language of the letter. Hawthorne supports this idea in his practice. He makes every effort to be alone while writing to Sophia, and believes that his connection to her is strongest when visitors do not interrupt him.

Hawthorne's letters are more invested in enriching and securing a long-lasting relationship with Sophia, both physically and spiritually, than either Sanford or Montraville want with their letters. He uses letter-writing ideals and conventions in order to construct a physical union between himself and Sophia. Hawthorne's letters represent his intentions fully and describe not only his reliance on her love, but also the benefits of their union for his happiness. Hawthorne's letters contrast drastically with those depicted in *The Coquette* and *Charlotte Temple* in that they are substantial, honest, and permanent.

Conclusion

Letter writing is fundamental to daily life in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Letters are esteemed; they are considered valuable pieces of history, influential business tools, and bridge the distance between loved ones. The skill of letter writing is examined thoroughly in letter-writing manuals, represented in fictional texts, and practiced at home.

The genre of the letter-writing manual wanted to share letter-writing skills with a wide range of Americans. The manuals presented letter writing as democratic and available to all citizens; they defined letter writing as a natural talent and equated it to conversation. The manuals failed in their mission to fully define letter writing democratic because of their insistence on the use of proper letter-writing tools and high expectation for writers to be well educated. The letter-writing manuals were a valuable resource for many individuals and frequently cited as authorities on letter-writing convention. However, the call for standardization set by letter-writing manuals both limited the individualism of letter writing and the ability of Americans to write proper letters.

The use of letters in novels, both epistolary and non-epistolary, follows the conventions set by letter-writing manuals. Letters were used in the seduction plot to protect the lady from the rake and to redeem her after her ruin. These letters were written in a similar fashion to the model letters in letter-writing manuals. The female friends and relatives of the lady wrote to her to convince her of the danger of seduction that she faced; the protective power of these letters was only temporarily successful and always overcome by the physical presence of the rake. After the lady's fall, she would write to her mother; this letter would encourage forgiveness and redeem the lady. The protective and redemptive property of the letters directly influenced the characters

in the text. Both *Charlotte Temple* and *The Coquette* supported the letter's ability to protect and redeem a young lady.

Nathaniel Hawthorne's letters to Sophia Peabody used letter-writing convention to construct a lasting relationship. Hawthorne manipulated familiar conventions of letter writing in order to construct a physical union between himself and Sophia. Hawthorne personified Sophia's letters to substitute her physical presence; he was then able to use his own letters to successfully construct a physical relationship with Sophia through letters. Hawthorne's letters are representative of love letters from the period, illustrating that the manipulation of letter-writing conventions was used for courtship in the nineteenth century.

Letter writing is an art that can be learned. It cannot be fully standardized because letter writers manipulate and alter convention in order to achieve their goals. The form of the letter and the knowledge of proper letter writing tools are cemented in American culture. The ideals of letter writing presented by the letter-writing manuals have been accepted by American society: letter writing is democratic and letters are a true representation of the writer's character. For these reasons, letters have been and will continue to be the ideal form of discourse between people.

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